

## 7/21/2008 This Week in Congress

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July 21, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

### Committee Approves Bill to Improve Access to Care for Rural Veterans

This week, the House Committee on Veterans Affairs approved legislation I introduced last year to provide more health care options for veterans living in rural areas when Veterans Affairs (VA) care is not available nearby. Despite best efforts, the reality is that some veterans live in remote areas beyond the VA's ability to construct medical facilities to care for them. These veterans are either forced to travel long distances for the care they need or forego care altogether. We need to expand the options available to them.

The Rural Veterans Access to Care Act establishes a three year pilot program in several regions across the country to allow those veterans living furthest from VA health facilities to get care closer to home through a local physician or hospital. To qualify, a veteran must live at least 60 miles from a VA clinic, 120 miles from a VA hospital or 240 miles from a VA specialized care facility when seeking that care. Many Kansas veterans living in the central and western parts of our state will be part of this demonstration project. This legislation is particularly beneficial for elderly Kansas veterans who often have difficulty making the long trip to the VA and for members of the Kansas Guard and Reserve who often live in rural parts of our state. This legislation now goes to the full House of Representatives for consideration.

### Congress Overrides President's Veto to Delay Physician Cuts

Congress prevented scheduled reductions in Medicare payments this week by voting to override the President's veto of the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act. This legislation will delay cuts in Medicare payments for 18 months and includes important provisions that require community pharmacists to be reimbursed in a timely manner. Among other things, the bill also delays the implementation of the Average Manufacturing Price payment system, which would reimburse pharmacists for less than what it costs to fill Medicaid prescriptions. I voted for this legislation in June and voted for it again this week. Had this bill not become law, Kansans would have suffered and many would have been unable to get the care and medicine they need. [Click here to view my remarks on the House floor.](#)

### Working to Provide Additional Feed Options for Kansas Ranchers

I introduced legislation this week to override the recent court order that halted Critical Feed Use of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres authorized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The court order removed a needed feed option and has caused frustration for Kansas producers.

On May 27, USDA announced more than 24 million acres of CRP land were eligible for Critical Feed Use to help alleviate the high price of livestock feed. This decision was welcomed by ranchers and many immediately began making stocking decisions. These producers expended time and money to fence and prepare CRP acres for grazing and haying. More than a month after ranchers began taking these steps, a judge issued a temporary restraining order stopping all Critical Feed Use activity.

The order to stop Critical Feed Use has severely impacted Kansas livestock producers. During this time of high feed prices, ranchers do not need one more thing to worry about. As a member of the House Agriculture Committee, I will continue working with USDA officials and Members of Congress to resolve this issue.

#### Recognizing Special Olympics for 40 Years of Empowering Individuals

I recognized Special Olympics this week in the House of Representatives on the occasion of its 40th anniversary. Since 1968, Special Olympics has empowered individuals with disabilities and given them confidence to face challenges in their daily lives. Special Olympics is a worldwide organization that provides sports training and athletic competition to more than 2.5 million people with intellectual disabilities. Through Special Olympics, athletes develop improved physical fitness and motor skills, greater self confidence and a more positive self image.

Since 2007, I have served as the Honorary Chairman for the Kansas Law Enforcement Torch Run. Kansas Law Enforcement officers cover hundreds of miles in the Torch Run throughout the state each year and raise thousands of dollars in support of Special Olympics Kansas programs. Last month, I joined Special Olympics Kansas athletes, fans, volunteers and families in Wichita for the opening ceremony of the 2008 Summer Games. [Click here to read my speech](#) and [click here to view photos from the opening ceremony of the 2008 Summer Games in Wichita](#).

#### Learning about Progress of Trade Talks

I met with United States Trade Representative Susan Schwab this week to discuss the progress of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Doha Round of Trade Negotiations. The Doha Round is in its seventh year of negotiations. As our country's chief trade negotiator, Ambassador Schwab is working to create new export opportunities for American agriculture, manufactured goods and services. Officials will meet over the course of the next several days in Switzerland to continue negotiations.

#### Agriculture Subcommittee Reviews Food Aid Delivery and Development Assistance

This week, I joined the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Specialty Crops, Rural Development and Foreign Agriculture to review food aid and agricultural development programs. The recent increased attention on agriculture, food prices and feeding the hungry has opened the door for discussions about making sure investments by the United States go to proven development tools. For too long our country has been trying to put band aids on the world's problems with repeated food assistance. It is time we take a long-term look at the cause of food insecurity in places such as Sub-Saharan Africa where crop yields are only 40 percent of that of the rest of the world's developing countries. While emergency food aid is important in response to disasters, food aid itself never cures the underlying problems facing developing countries.

#### Visiting Kansas Communities

Hoisington: I was in Hoisington this week to meet with community business leaders and Chamber of Commerce Director Stacey Bressler. I visited the new offices for USD 431, Clara Barton Hospital and Superior Essex, a company that designs and manufactures wire and cable products, with Stacey and Chamber Board of Directors President Karen Van Brimmer. Thanks to Board of Education Clerk Bonnie Smith, School Board President Don Reif and School Board Vice President Dean Stoskopf for the tour of the school district's new office. I also enjoyed visiting with Hospital Administrator

Chuck Waters and Superior Essex Plant Manager Brent Rensch and Jennifer Lagerman. At Superior Essex, we talked about how high gas prices are making it difficult to attract workers from other communities.

Hays: On Friday evening, I stopped by the Ellis County Fair in Hays to view exhibits and visit with folks from the area. I enjoy this time of year and visiting county fairs throughout the state to see the various projects and entries of both young and old alike. County fairs bring families together and are a great way to highlight our Kansas communities.

Trego: On Saturday morning, I participated in the Trego County Fair parade in WaKeeneey. The fair began July 16 and goes through Thursday. I enjoyed visiting with many Kansans that were out for the fair activities. Thanks to Vic Kinderknecht for driving me in the parade.

#### Mourning the Loss of Danny Biggs of Great Bend

On Friday, I attended the funeral service for Danny Biggs of Great Bend. Danny was involved in the oil and gas industry and was a pillar of the Great Bend community. He was a dear friend to me and many others who had the privilege of knowing and working with him. I will miss his friendship and know he will be greatly missed by his friends and family and the community he loved so much. My thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Darlene, and the rest of their family.

In the Office

Brenda Morgan of Concordia was in with FFA to talk about how knowledge of agriculture leads to a well-rounded education. Gary Du and Jiang Hu of Overland Park, Linda Wang of Lenexa and Melody Griffin of Olathe were in to tell me about human rights abuses and the mistreatment of Falun Gong members. Vic and Kay Streufert of Lindsborg were in with DC RESULTS to discuss how lowering the earned income tax credit could benefit many low income families.

Karl Weissenbach of Abilene was in with the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum to provide an update on the proposed Eisenhower Memorial in Washington, D.C. Ernie Kutzley and Bob Harvey of Topeka were in with AARP to discuss the importance of passing legislation to improve the Medicare program and maintain access to physicians. Barbara Williams of Olathe was in with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to discuss the certification process and the impact it has on the quality of teaching and learning for students.

Jay Allbaugh and Kimberly Edmunds of Wichita were in with Cox Communications to tell me about the cable industry's efforts to inform Kansans of the digital television transition. Bob Henry of Robinson, Lance Rezac of Onaga, Craig Gistad of Winchester and Dennis Hupe of Perry were in with the Kansas Soybean Association to discuss their legislative priorities. Dr. Dan Sweeney of Parsons and Dr. Gary Pierzynski of Manhattan were in with the Soil Society of America to talk about the importance of continued funding and support for soil science research in Kansas and across the nation.

Ken McCauley of White Cloud, Brian Baalman of Menlo, Greg and Angela Stone of Garden City, Bob Timmons of Fredonia, Charles Foltz and Jere White of Garnett, Sue Schulte of Princeton, Shainya Timmons of Fredonia and Karly Schulte of Ottawa were in with the National Corn Growers Association to discuss implementation of the farm bill and the Renewable Fuel Standard. Stan Stark of Haviland was in with Land O'Lakes to talk about the cooperative's presence in Kansas, implementation of the farm bill and potential changes to the Clean Water Act.

Several Kansans were in to take a tour of the U.S. Capitol building this week, including Merlene Baird of Larned, Paul Popelka of Munden, and Ed and Marjory Johnson of Hutchinson. Also in for a tour were Daniel, Gina, Lee and Emily Janes of Hannibal; James, Darci, James, Lake and Brett Lyman of Ellinwood; Jude, Heather, Katia and Micah Matter of Jewell; Patrick, Pat and Katy Colloton of Leawood; and Pat, David, Kimberly and Christopher Cummings of Meade. In from Hays were Doug, Kim, Abby and Mark Schneeweis and Todd, Alicia, Zachary, Madeleine and Ethan Brungardt.

Very truly yours,

Jerry